

Low-Cost Ways to Preserve Family Archives



ALCTS WEBINAR CELEBRATING
PRESERVATION WEEK

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Why Family Archives Matter



- Most everyone have family archives
- They tell the story of who we are
- Future generations will have a record of where they came from
- Family archives tell the story of our communities
- Family treasures can become national treasures



What are Family Archives?

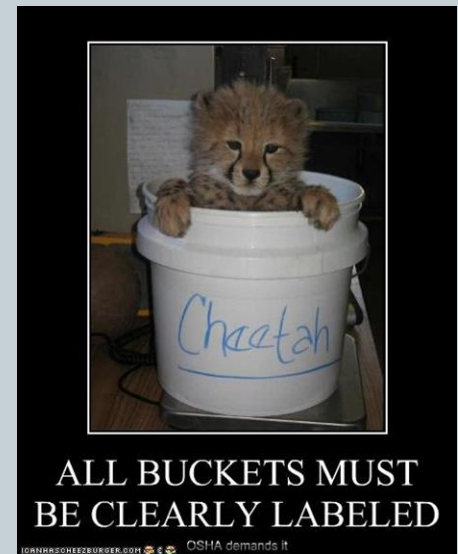


- May be sentimental, legal, financial
- They serve as proof that an event occurred, or to explain how something happened
- A physical collection of books, paper documents, photographs, etc.; or a place where collections are stored
- Electronic records: email, web sites, databases, sound and images (another webinar – *Personal Digital Archiving* with Mike Ashenfelder, LC, at <http://www.ala.org/alcts/confevents/upcoming/webinar/pres/042413>) . See also *Personal Archiving: Preserving our Digital Heritage*, edited by Donald T. Hawkins.

Organizing Family Archives



- Identify: writers and receivers should be fully labeled; separate notes are fine; include any other relevant information
- Organize: Avoid letting the collection get scattered or misidentified



POLL Question #1



- What do you have that represent your family archives that you plan to preserve? Check all that apply.
- Books, scrapbooks, diaries and pamphlets
- Documents (letters, deeds, marriage certificates)
- Newspapers and newspaper clippings
- Photographs – prints, slides, negatives, film
- Audio/Video – film, discs, cassettes, reel to reel

Major Ways to Protect Collections



- Control the environment: temperature, humidity, light, dirt and dust
- Use the right type of enclosures
- Careful, limited handling
- Use copies instead of originals



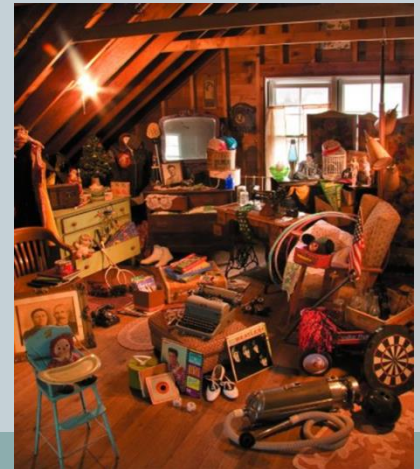
ALSO:

- Protect Against Emergencies

POLL Question #2



- Where are your physical family archives currently stored? Check all that apply.
 - In an attic
 - In a basement or garage
 - In the main part of a house or apartment
 - Offsite (U-storage vault, safety deposit box)
 - Other



Environmental Risks – T & RH



- Temperature: Too hot? For every 10 degree C rise in temperature the rate of deterioration/decay is doubled
- Relative Humidity: Too high or too low
- Avoid extremes, including rapid changes in T & RH
- Ideal: Cool and dry

(60 to 65° F; 30 to 40% RH)



Low-Cost Solutions for Minimizing Damage from T & RH



- Avoid basements and attics
- Use enclosures to buffer sudden changes in T & RH
- Store family archives in the central part of the home in boxes, drawers, closets, under beds where T & RH are more stable
- Seal windows, cracks and crevices
- Lower the temperature in your home during the winter months

Low-Cost Solutions for Minimizing Damage from T & RH

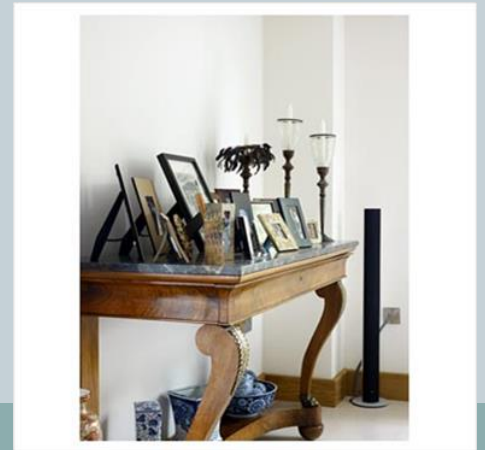


- Use of insulated curtains; blinds; window films to reduce radiant heating
- Use a dehumidifier in damp areas
- Use AC to control temperature and humidity in the summer months

Environmental Risk - Light



- All types of light cause damage
- Two factors to consider: intensity and duration
- Can be a source of heat/overheating
- Damage includes fading, discoloration, and embrittlement
- Damage is permanent and irreversible



Low-Cost Solutions for Controlling Light Damage



- Use curtains and blinds in a systematic way
- Keep lights off when no one is around
- Framed works should be away from direct sources of natural light
- Avoid using fluorescent lighting in spaces where valuable items are displayed



Low-Cost Solutions for Controlling Light Damage



- Avoid the use of display lighting; use low wattage bulbs with dimmers
- Don't leave things on display “permanently” - rotate
- Display copies and store originals in the dark



Environmental Risks: Dirt & Dust



- Particulate debris can become embedded in paper objects, textiles, any surface that is rough or sticky
- It can scratch
- Often acidic; so if there's moisture in the air the debris can solubilize – the result is localized deterioration
- Dirt and dust can attract microscopic molds and insects (including book lice)



Low-Cost Solutions to Control Dust & Dirt



- Regular housekeeping
- Use enclosures
- Air filters in your central heating/cooling system
- Window screens

POLL Question #3



- Characterize how your physical family archives are currently stored. Check all that apply.
- Organized and properly stored in a few known locations
- Sort of organized and stored pretty well
- Not very organized, but you know where most of it is
- It's a mess and one day you hope to get it organized
- In scrapbooks and albums or framed and on display



Tips on Use of Physical Collections



- Never repair with pressure sensitive tapes or commercial adhesives
- Segregate acidic items like newspaper clippings
- No clips, pins or rubber bands
- View your collection items with clean hands in an area that is clean and uncluttered



Caring for Books



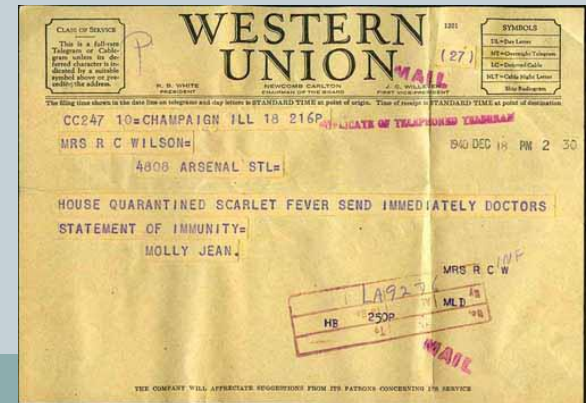
- Shelved upright, fully supported
- Oversize books can be shelved spine down or flat
- Don't pull books out from the head cap
- Store fragile books in fitted boxes
- Don't fold over corners, use Post-it notes, notate, or leave any extraneous material inside the pages
- Don't leave it open, face down, or stacked with others, face up



Storing Documents



- File cabinets – best quality folders; hanging files are best
- Boxes – various sizes and designs depending on what you are storing; sturdy, chemically stable; no holes and snug lids
- Acid-free, lignin-free and buffered paper, board and tissue
- Polyester, polyethylene or polypropylene if using plastic
- Use folders instead of envelopes so you avoid causing damage when getting things in and out



Storing Photographs



- Best if enclosures have passed the Photographic Activity Test, P.A.T. (<https://www.imagepermanenceinstitute.org/testing/pat>)
- Avoid plastic sleeves if storing in areas where humidity runs high
- When storing photographs in an album use mounting corners; albums should be constructed with good quality paper and/or stable plastic pages (no self-adhesive albums or scrapbook pages)



Storing Photographs



- Preserve albums intact whenever possible and store them in boxes
- Store cased photographs in their original cases
- Segregate anything that smells funny (possible sign of deterioration); if you have broken glass plates store each piece wrapped separately

Oversize Collections



- Store flat whenever possible, not rolled or folded
- Refold newspapers along the original center fold with the edges aligned
- Stack newspapers inside fitted boxes in chronological order
- If you roll something roll it around a tube, secure it in place by wrapping with tissue and tying with cotton tying tape, then place into a larger diameter tube capped at both ends



Audio Visual Stuff



- Handle grooved and optical discs by the edges or center hole only
- Handle open reel and magnetic tape by the edges or outer shell only; do not touch the spools
- Handle film only by the edge
- Store all formats upright
- Keep playback equipment clean and well maintained
- If it's badly deteriorating consult a specialist and copy to new media



Framing Items for Home Display



- **Tell your framer what you expect**
 - Use of 100% cotton mat and mounting boards
 - Always use a window mat
 - Acid-free backing boards (no cheap cardboard or masonite!)
- **You may prefer to be the one who disassembles**
- **Consult a conservator – design options, mounting, installation**

Display of Family Archives



- Interior rooms are more stable than those with outside walls
- Don't store or display your family archives above or immediately adjacent to heat vents, radiators and fireplaces
- Don't hang framed works of any value on outside walls; use spacers between the frame and the wall
- Make a copy and put this out for viewing; store the original



POP QUIZ!!!!



- What is the best way to store paper documents?
Choose only one answer.
- Labelled with permanent ink and folded into envelopes
- In acid-free folders in a records storage box
- In sealed plastic bags in the basement where it's cooler
- In file folders in a file cabinet someplace warm

Prepare for Emergencies



Vital Records Protection



- Protect your rights, secure your health, document your financial assets
- Legal records
- Historically important records

- Make duplicates and store in a safe place outside your home
- “Grab and Go” packs
- Preventing damage to originals



Salvage



- Safety first!
- Prevent mold – 48 hours
- Air dry
- Clean gently
- Focus on what's important to you if you can't save everything
- Freeze and thaw/air dry later
- Conservation services when you need help



Questions?



THANK YOU!



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Selected Resources



- Library of Congress leaflets, Collections Care: <http://www.loc.gov/preservation/care/>
- Heritage Emergency National Task Force: <http://www.heritagepreservation.org/programs/taskfer.htm>
- American Institute for Conservation, Guides for Taking Care of Your Personal Heritage: http://www.conservation-us.org/about-conservation/caring-for-your-treasures#.UyC_bIXLKLw
- Quick Preservation Tips for Military Families: <http://www.ala.org/alcts/sites/ala.org.alcts/files/content/confevents/preswk/pdfs/QTmilitary13.pdf>
- Quick Preservation Tips – Take the First Step: <http://www.ala.org/alcts/sites/ala.org.alcts/files/content/confevents/preswk/pdfs/QTgeneral13.pdf>